

Kidlington Parish Council Chair's report December 2021

Kidlington residents may have been surprised (once again) to read the recent announcements that Oxford United Football Club (OUFC) are planning to relocate their stadium and related activities to Stratfield Brake (SB) in Kidlington. The Parish Council only learnt of the plans shortly beforehand, over Christmas.

SB is owned by Oxford County Council (OCC), leased by Cherwell District Council (CDC), and sub-leased by the Parish Council and Gosford and Water Eaton Council. It is now managed on a day-to-day basis by CDC, but the Parish Council continues to contribute a very substantial operating subsidy. Regular users of the sports ground include Kidlington Cricket Club, Gosford All Blacks Rugby Club, Kidlington Running Club, Kidlington Youth Football Club. There is no doubt of SB's importance for sport in Kidlington, but the financial cost of supporting it is very high in relation to the number of Kidlington users, moreover many of the users come from outside Kidlington.

OUFC's current plans cover both the present SB site on the West of Frieze Way, and the triangle of land opposite it on the other side of Frieze way, with its top corner at the Sainsburys roundabout. The whole development would comprise a new 18,000 capacity football stadium with ancillary leisure and commercial facilities including hotel, retail, conference, and training/community grounds. We understand (subject to confirmation) that extensive on-site parking is not planned for fans, who will be encouraged to use public transport or the two nearby park-and-rides, with improved pedestrian connections to the stadium.

At the time of writing, the OCC cabinet is about to be asked to enter into negotiations with OUFC and SB's current tenants (including us) to "enable the use of OCC owned land for the development of a new football stadium, subject to planning permission". This includes the following objectives (to quote from the on-line cabinet agenda):

- i. maintain a green barrier between Oxford and Kidlington and improve access to nature and green spaces;
- ii. enhance facilities for local sports groups and on-going financial support;
- iii. significantly improve the infrastructure connectivity in this location, improving public transport to reduce the need for car travel in so far as possible, and to improve sustainable transport through increased walking, cycling and rail use;
- iv. develop local employment opportunities in Oxfordshire;
- v. increase education and innovation through the provision of a sports centre of excellence and facilities linked to elite sport, community sport, health and wellbeing;
- vi. support OCC's net zero carbon emissions pledge through high sustainable development;

There are a number of very obvious advantages to this scheme. Many will see it as a prestige asset for the Village, it should guarantee improved sporting facilities for Kidlington residents, it should save the Parish Council a great deal of expense which could be diverted to other purposes, and it will create employment opportunities. The disadvantages are equally obvious. It will involve further erosion of the Green Belt around the village, it will create traffic congestion, and possibly major parking problems in the Village, particularly Garden City and Gosford, and there will be noise pollution, possibly from events such as rock concerts as well as matches. Agreements could be put in place to mitigate some of these problems, but how reliable will they be in the long term?

The Parish Council is therefore faced with a very difficult decision, as it is likely that opinions in the Village will be strongly divided. What we have to do is look at the proposals seriously and with an

open mind, and negotiate to see how they could be modified or developed to meet the needs and concerns of Kidlington residents, particularly with regard to traffic and parking, green spaces, biodiversity and use of the Green Belt. Then we will decide whether or not to support the proposals, and if we do support them, subject to what conditions. Our priority throughout must be to represent as well as we can the interests of Kidlington residents as a whole, not those of OCC or OUFC.

DAVID ROBEY